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A PSEUDO-ROMAN RELIEF IN THE UFFIZI. — A
RENAISSANCE FORGERY

It is not always easy to distinguish, on casual observation, a genuine Roman relief from Renaissance copies or adaptations, such as those of some sarcophagi of the age of the Antonines. Such reproductions commenced with the earliest days of Renaissance sculpture; witness Donatello's copy, in one of the medallions of the court of the Medici-Riccardi palace in Florence, of a scene from the end of a sarcophagus which still stands in the court itself.

This is the excuse if not the explanation of the fact that a Renaissance relief has been all these years masquerading as a Roman work in the hall of Roman sculptures at the Uffizi, and has been gravely described as antique (Fig. 1).¹ More than four years ago,² I decided that it could not be an antique work, but only recently was I able to examine in Rome other works from the same workshop of the Early Renaissance, which enabled me to date it and place it with accuracy. I then put my theory to a practical test. I took a photograph of the relief, after removing all signs by which it might be identified, to the well-known Renaissance critic Adolfo Venturi, and asked him whether he thought it a work of Renaissance art from a Roman

¹ *Einzelaufnahmen*, Ser. I, No. 236; Dütschke, *Zerstreute Ant. Bildwerke*, III, 526.

² This was in April, 1905. It is curious that three men should have independently reached similar conclusions. After beginning this article in Rome, I referred to it in a conversation with Dr. Hülsen, and he kindly called my attention to an article by Rizzo, published in the *Römische Mitteilungen* in 1907, in which the author says that both Dr. Amelung and himself had independently decided that this relief was not antique. Of this I was quite unaware until Dr. Hülsen told me. It will be seen that I not only attribute the relief to an earlier date than does Rizzo, and determine its school, but that my conclusions as to its theme and its relation to classic models are fundamentally different.



FIGURE 1.—RELIEF IN THE UFFIZI.

workshop. "Of course," he said, "there can be no doubt of it." "Then," I said, "you don't think it a work of classic Roman art?" "What," he answered, in a tone of horrified disbelief, "you are not going to try to prove it Roman?" "No," I replied, "but that it is not."

The relief is not large, measuring only 1.24 m. in length, and 0.60 m. in height. It has evidently lost its crowning member, including the capitals of the two decorative projecting pilasters that frame it at each end. The scene consists of twelve figures engaged in or presiding over a sacrificial scene composed of such a farrago of mistakenly united classic elements as to be difficult of rational description. In the centre is a flaming altar, in front of it a Roman emperor in military costume, with mantle fastened over his right shoulder but draped over his head. In his left hand he grasps his sword, and in his right is a wand with which he touches the altar. Several men, bearded and beardless, assist the Emperor, holding the accessories for the sacrifice—ewers, incense box, and a wand—that may be a misinterpretation of the *praefericulum*. All these figures stand a little back from the Emperor; they are, with one exception, crowned with the triumphal wreath, as he is. Thus far we have a scene that is clearly an adaptation of the imperial sacrifice so common on Roman triumphal arches and memorial columns, with the substitution of grown men in place of the youthful *camilli* as assistants of the Emperor, and without any one to represent the priest. But where are the sacrificial animals, or at least the ox, and where are the sacrificing attendants?

In their place we find in the foreground elements taken from quite another scene of Roman sculpture, which may have been partly derived from just such a sarcophagus as that published by Rizzo in his study on the representations of early Roman myths.¹ This original scene reproduces in his opinion certain legendary matrimonial rites under the auspices of Juno Pronuba, the patroness of marriage. So, in front of the altar in the Uffizi relief we see the sow with her litter, emblem of Juno, held by a sacrificer of small stature, though grown in years.

¹ G. E. Rizzo, 'Leggende latine antichissime' in *Röm. Mitt.*, XXI, pp. 289-306 and 398-402.

To the left stands the boy Ascanius (?) in his Phrygian cap. Then at either end a female figure, seated, frames the scene. That on the left is on a rock against which leans a shield, and she holds a sheaf of wheat (?); that on the right sits on a higher rocky projection and leans on a staff held by her left hand. They are allegorical figures, representing perhaps *Roma* or *Virtus*, and are similar to such figures on the friezes of the arch of Septimius Severus and on numerous coins, especially of the Antonine period.

To any student at all familiar with both Roman and Renaissance sculpture it does not require this demonstration of the absurd juxtaposition of unrelated classic themes to prove the date of the work. It is quite evident from the workmanship alone. The end pilasters are characteristically Renaissance. The facial peculiarities, especially the high cheek bones and the deep lines and furrows about nose and mouth, the form of the wreaths and the high heads, are some of the other most self-evident unclassic characteristics.

To what age and to what school should this relief be attributed?

It shows itself in its style the work of the Early Renaissance before the easier handling that came in about 1500. The city of Rome is indicated as the artist's home, if not his birthplace, by the character of the scene, for no such close imitation of the antique was likely in any other artistic centre. This presupposition is confirmed by the works actually produced by the Roman sculptors who flourished in Rome between *ca.* 1450 and 1480. The workshops of Paolo Romano, of Cristoforo Romano and their pupils and associates, rivalled those of the Tuscans and Lombards who flocked to Rome to take advantage of Papal patronage. The work of this school that most closely resembles our relief is the ciborium of Pope Sixtus IV († 1484), a pretentious work with a large and varied sculptured decoration,¹ in which several men of the Roman school were associated, as we can see by the records published in *L'Arte*, which is gradually making known the neglected works of these Roman artists.

¹ The *dissecta membra* of this important work are in the crypts of S. Peter, and so have been hitherto passed by.

It is not many years since it was possible, without being obviously ridiculous, to make the assertion that the artists of the Early Renaissance studied antique figured compositions almost exclusively in the scenes of the column of Trajan. Now we know that they were equally industrious in copying from triumphal arches, monumental friezes, sarcophagi, and decorative panels. The present relief is merely one more proof. It is really immaterial to inquire whether the artist intended to deceive. He was at any rate a Roman, and produced this work between *ca.* 1460 and 1480. Merely as a work of Renaissance sculpture it has considerable interest, aside from its demonstration of a tendency to exact reproduction of antique models.

Signor Rizzo, who, independently with myself, reached the conclusion that this relief was not antique, has published a supplementary note about it in connection with his publication of the Torre Nova sarcophagus, the scene on which he interprets as that of the mythical marriage of Aeneas and the daughter of King Latinus, under the patronage of Juno Pronuba and of Mars. The sow and her litter and the boy Ascanius are present; also two figures seated on rocks and with shields decorated, one with the Wolf and Twins, the other with a battle scene. These figures he identifies with Mars. He regards the Uffizi relief as important for a reconstruction of this sarcophagus, of which only the lower front part remains. The main divergences between what remains of the sarcophagus and our relief are that the seated figures are male in the former and female in the latter; and that in the sarcophagus there are no traces of any of the principal standing figures except one, the sacrificer. Furthermore, Rizzo believes that the Roman original copied by the Renaissance sculptor originally contained more figures on the right, representing the nuptial scene of the *dextrarum iunctio*, or joining of hands, under the protection of Juno Pronuba. He explains the substitution on the Uffizi relief of female for male seated figures by supposing that the original was not only mutilated on the right end, but also in the upper part, so that the Renaissance artist mistook men for women. He thinks the sacrificial scene meaningless, except as an adjunct to the nuptial scene on the right, which had been

lost on the original before the copyist saw it. He concludes : " The Uffizi relief is a relatively faithful copy, executed perhaps early in the sixteenth century, of a fragmentary relief of the imperial period, similar to that of Torre Nova, and serves to give us an idea of the missing parts of this monument, the interpretation of which can be regarded as absolutely certain."

I cannot agree with Signor Rizzo in any of his conclusions. The artist of the Uffizi relief intended to represent, purely and simply, an imperial sacrifice; the triumphal wreaths that crown the Emperor, his assistants, and the sacrificer admit of no other interpretation, and are not found on other sacrificial occasions. In my opinion the Uffizi relief (1) is not a copy, faithful or free, of any one Roman work, but a pot-pourri; (2) the subject is not a section of a nuptial scene, but a pseudo-imperial sacrifice; (3) the seated female figures were not misinterpretations of mutilated *male* originals, but copies of such models as the "Roma" or "Virtus" of the friezes of the arch of Septimius Severus and of the coins; (4) the "Ascanius" and the sow and her litter are partly derived from some monument similar to the Torre Nova sarcophagus, partly from some such sarcophagus as that of S. Lorenzo, and their substitution for the usual sacrificial animal and a Camillus attendant is due to ignorance.

Evidently the artist *prenait son bien où il le trouvait* and was familiar with numerous reliefs. Could we have actually followed his mental workings as he carved, we should doubtless have found them similar to those of the Phoenicians who imitated Egyptian works so cleverly. In both cases the artist was serenely ignorant of the iconography he was copying and rearranging, and he heedlessly juxtaposed irreconcilable elements when they made to him an aesthetic appeal.

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